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ABSTRACT

A theory is presented describing the structure of the conceptual patterns and demonstrating how sexism or racism (red-neck or symbolic) is developed and institutionalized in the interview process. After a review of recent research on the subject, the author explores the structural relationship of the American belief system, tracing its roots from religion, to psychology, then behavior modification, to transactional analysis. The triadic mode of conceptualization present in each (e.g., reward/behavior/punishment in behavior modification) is noted. A parallel structural relation of White/society/Black is drawn. These relationships are then applied to the interview situation and it is suggested that the outcome of the process is that the interviewer chooses the individual who is most like him. The result being that "if one is not White, then the closer one is to being White, the better off one is; and if one is not male, then the closer one is to being male, the better off one is." Studies showing that faculty and administration believe that sexism and racism do not exist on the campus further illustrate the problem. (PHR)

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A THEORY ON THE CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: THE INTERVIEW

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A THEORY ON THE CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: THE INTERVIEW

ABSTRACT

Many educators are concerned with unbiasedly selecting students and staffs who will participate in some type of educational pursuit. Without a clear understanding of how we develop biases in the first place, the task is virtually impossible. Because the structural relationship of the "American" belief system is hierarchial, with the best on the top and the worst on the bottom, differences are not understood. The cause of sexism and racism can be understood by an examination of the conceptual structure of the belief system -- red-neck and symbolic racism are different symptoms (rationalizations) of the same sickness; to emphasize the symptom is to lose sight of the cause. This paper offers a fresh new theory which describes the structure of the conceptual patterns and shows how sexism or racism, whether red-neck or symbolic, is developed and institutionalized.

A THEORY ON THE CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: THE INTERVIEW

Introduction and Clarification

Many educators are concerned with selecting students and administrators who will participate in some type of educational pursuit. The author has particularly in mind the selection of students for minority and "special" programs on predominately white campuses and the choice of persons to direct and supervise such programs. However, much of the following discussion applies to the total educational community who must interview and select persons to participate in programs or run programs covering the whole range of institutional activities. Because this paper is directed at all persons who participate in the interview and selection process, the typical presentation suited for the "helping professional" -- caseworker, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc. -- will be broadened.

While the research literature abounds with examples showing correlation between prejudice and group membership (Maykovich, 1975; Ehrlich, 1973; Newman, 1973; Simpson and Yenger, 1972), a comprehensive review of literature on the interviewing process yields very little information that can be presented to the person without considerable training in a "helping" profession. The literature does suggest, however, a set of guiding principles and specific skills, the most profound of which is "to start where the client is."

Many interviewers are not fully aware where the client is -- or where they themselves are. Stempler (1975) raised questions about the conceptual nature of "aversive racism," but offered no theoretical solution. Polansky (1971: 241-257) wrote an interesting chapter on the "duplicity in the interview." The reader may or may not find Polansky's presentation useful. In either event, this writer will introduce a fresh theory. It is a peculiar characteristic of persons

educated or reared in the United States that they are almost without the capacity to comprehend people whom they perceive as fundamentally different from themselves. Particularly, they attempt to understand and explain the "world" totally within the structural relationship of their own belief systems. Herein lies the crux of the problem.

The structural relationship of the "American" belief system is hierarchial, with the best on the top and the worst on the bottom. Parts of the psychological consequences of this belief system are manifested in the descriptive terminology manufactured by the U.S. institutions. That U.S. citizens call themselves "Americans," as if they are the only people in the Americas, is reflective of the hierarchial mentality. Another reflection is the confusion and unhappiness caused in American life by the struggle of so many people to be number one. Those examples are complicated by a peculiar lack of nationhood in which nationality is confused with race, color, religion, and national origin.

Berger et al (1974: 108) speaks of the symbolic universe of modernity and maintains that "social life is permeated by a network of cognitive and normative definitions of reality." Affluent Whites think that Blacks should be at a lower level than themselves (Ashmore and McConahay, 1975). Again, Whites attempt to keep Blacks out of "their" neighborhood even when the Blacks could afford to live there (Hamilton and Bishop, 1976) and they make other attempts to prevent affirmative action. McConahay and Hough (1976) define symbolic racism as "the expression in terms of abstract ideological symbols and symbolic behavior of the feelings that Blacks are violating cherished values and making illegitimate demands for changes in the racial status quo." It is precisely at that point that symbolic

racism legitimatizes red-neck racism, thus further institutionalizing the racist phenomenon, and raises the need for a theory which examines basic structures of the phonomenon.

The Theory

It is presumed throughout this presentation that any theory that attempts to explain why people act and feel as they do is worth learning -- worth learning because we, all of us, have as much influence on the people with whom we interact as they have on us. It is my experience that once in a while each person must stop to assess the consequences of how, precisely, he does influence others. This theory is not intended to be a cure-all for people engaging in the interview process. In fact, its aim is no more than to have us question our value sets -- to understand how we came to hold certain values, and to show the implications of this process on the interviewing procedure.

Polansky (1971) wrote: "We need a precise basis for judging relevance. Let us face it: raw reality is simply chaotic. Therefore, a cardinal aim of a good theory must be to reduce the chaos of raw experience." It is readily apparent that survival and/or degrees of success in a post-technological society are predicated on the ability to deal with chaos, especially so for minorities. He goes on to explain, in part, the cause and effect phenomenon. However, the philosophical foundation of the author's theory is the minority/majority incongruences in society which promote the self-fulfilling prophesy in the interview. Differences in the U.S. society are not understood, but rather conceptualized

in a good/bad framework. The question can be put thus: "How high is one who relates to a downness to corroborate his upness?"

Figure 1 about here.

First we investigate the Good/Literature/Evil structure, the history that man and woman have been writing for centuries. The old literature dealt with the extremes of the human condition or emotion, good and evil. At first, the characters in old literature were said to have been either good or evil. Later, it was believed that one's character was much more complex -- yet either the good or evil dominates; one must, therefore, make concerted efforts to be good. Parents modeled themselves after the good character and taught their children to be like them.

As the concept of good and evil evolved, humanity compiled a long list of good and evil characters, which emerged in the next structure, Bible/Humanity/Mythology. The good people believed in religion, which is symbolized by the Bible, and evil people believed in paganism, which is symbolized by mythology. As the western societies developed abilities for abstraction, the people moved closer to grasping the idea instead of the object.

The next structural relationship is an example of society's attempt to grasp an idea of religion. The classical theological argument is that God, The Most Good, is and represents all that is good; while the devil, the anti-good, is and represents all which is evil. Moreover, God or the Devil enter humanity through the Human Soul. This is a fairly complex theological thesis alone, but it is further complicated with parthenogenesis, sacerdotalism, and the trinity. Parthenogenesis or conception without physical contact gave rise to a notion

that sexual intercourse is somehow evil or at least less than holy. The idea of sacerdotalism attempts to put a priest between God and man, who indulges in sexual intercourse. The prevailing western concept of Christianity is the trinity -- the Father/Son/Holy Ghost ideology. The Son is a kind of neutral entity -- a way into the process. The Father represents The Most Good -- an orderly discipline. The Holy Ghost is representative of a kind of spontaneity -- an undisciplined experience. Disorder has a closeness to evil in our present conceptualization process.

About here in the structural relationships color started to take on an importance of its own. History reveals that the Christian pioneers were soon to refer to American Indians -- Native Americans, as red devils. By the time we advance to the last triadic structural relationships color, itself, will connote good or evil.

As our learning progressed, society came to believe that God, who is good, created man in His likeness and that should make man good also. Therefore, if a man is not good, something must be wrong with him; he must be insane. Following society's conceptual patterns, Freud developed his triology, Super Ego/Ego/Id. True to the conceptualization pattern, Freud's ego was a kind of neutral entity. The super ego, is the person's morality so to speak, the stuff which made the person good. The id is the undisciplined stuff.

A group of social scientists and scholars became unhappy with the internally focused psychology (especially psychoanalysis) and formulated another school of thought which follows the triadic mode -- behavior modification. These theoreticians and practitioners considered the behavior to be the neutral aspect of the

science. The main contention of the behaviorist is that we need not concern ourselves with the good/evil extremes thought to be man's nature, but to reward good behavior and punish bad behavior. Thus, this process, meticulously conducted, will condition the client to be the way the therapist wants him. Still we have a reward/behavior/punishment structure which is similar to the earlier good/neutral/evil structure.

Again, the triadic mode of conceptualization is present in another off-shoot of treatment structure -- psychiatry -- transactional analysis. Harris (1969) in his book I'm OK -- You're OK, develops a "practical guide to transactional analysis." He distinguishes three active elements in each person's make-up: "The Parent, the Adult, and the Child (P-A-C)." Harris suggests that the Parent personifies the don'ts (and a few do's) implanted in one's earliest years and automatically accepted as gospel. The child represents spontaneous emotion. Both parent and child must be kept in proper relation to the adult, "whose function is that of a reality computer that grinds out decisions based on the data derived from experience." The positive/neutral/negative conceptual structure is in Harris's model also.

Finally, we consider the White/Society/Black structural relationship which is basic in the western conceptualization mode. In western thought and teachings, White implicitly and explicitly represents all that is positive while Black is depicted as the evil omen. This has been illustrated in many attitudinal studies (Schulman, 1974; Rubin, 1972; Weitz, 1972; Sigall and Page, 1971). However, society is portrayed as a sort of neutral entity in an abstract sense (all men are created equal). The person who makes up the society naturally must be born with some color between white and black and thus with perceived degrees of innate good and evil.

Rosenhart (1975) shed some light on the nature of ethnic stereotyping while McConahay and Hough (1976) made a great distinction between "red-neck" and "symbolic" racism, but they failed to see the linear relationship of old and new racism which came from the same conceptual mode. There has been much concern about the abstract nature of this "new" racism (Pettigrew, 1975; Sears and McConahay, 1973; Campbell, 1971) without a fundamental understanding that human values are institutionalized by their conceptual nature. The cause of racism can be understood by an examination of the structure of the belief system -- red-neck and symbolic racism are different symptoms (rationalizations) of the same sickness; to emphasize the symptom is to lose sight of the cause or never discover the cause, as the case may be.

The basic contradiction in hierarchial conceptualization is the very foundation of mental illness in the western civilization. A person's need to be good or become good puts him on a narrow road to insanity because of the inherent contradictions in the person's thought conceptualization processes. The person struggles perpetually to become a non-existent best. The White person feels that if he is not better than the Black person, then somehow he has failed his whiteness. The Black person feels that because he is Black he must try twice as hard to succeed when competing against Whites and that he has not even won when he has. He was born a black, a loser, at the bottom of the "triad." Causes, effects, and circumstances are ignored and the society goes insane by varying degrees, each person trying to be number one in the world.

The quest to be number one often overlooks a fundamental truth: scientifically, we know that under certain circumstances it takes more courage for

one child simply to walk than it takes for another child to learn to run a nine-second 100 yard dash. Yet, society's reward structure is unable to deal equally with those two different accomplishments.

As each person participates in an interview-selection process, he must, necessarily, carry with him the psychological and sociological misperceptions of his learned value judgments. The consequences will become clearer as we analyze the conceptual structure of our behavior in an interaction mode.

Figure 2 about here.

In the above conceptual structure, the interviewee is the person in the interactional situation who is attempting to get something while the interviewer is the person who has the power to either decide if the interviewee gets the something or influences the decision. Any time two (or more for that matter) people meet for formal discussion or interaction there is an agenda -- the topics to be discussed. The hidden agenda is that set of things at a conscious or unconscious level that one person will tend not to disclose to the other person; these impressions are intended to be hidden from the second party(ies). The psychological processes which cause and nurture this hidden agenda phenomenon were implicitly demonstrated in the "triadic structural relationships" presented earlier. No one feels that he is really as good as he would like others to believe that he is or that he wants to be.

The interview interaction can be termed hypothetical because the hidden agenda phenomenon is functioning -- hypothetical in a theoretical sense and ostensible in a functional sense. That is, each person in the process will be attempting to "read between the lines" as much as he will be trying to interpret

what is actually being said. The net effect of this type of interaction is a kind of conjectural assessment of the interactional processes. Each person's concern (and sometimes obsession) with his own value set (those things the person believes to be good/bad, right/wrong, proper/improper, etc.) to live by carries his interactions with others untouchable. The collective outcome of these taught characteristics is that the interviewee goes into the interaction looking for parts of himself in the interviewer. When that interactional situation is optimum, the interviewer simply inflates the interviewee's ego by being persuaded by the interviewee as having characteristics which the interviewee likens to himself. The human propensity for self-perpetuation is extended to the corporate's will through this process. In the end, the interviewer confirms that this person is like him and therefore the best person for the job. (How many times has the successful candidate been picked in the very first interview and the process allowed to continue as it would look right?)

Another focus in the interactional process is rap. Rap refers to the communication exchange between the interviewee and the interviewer. The word rap suggests that the interview process often has a sort of false humility in it. That phenomenon tends to cause the interviewee to "talk down" to the interviewer while the interviewer simultaneously tends to "put on airs" to favorably impress the interviewee. The poet captured rap well when he wrote, "Tell me not in a mournful number/Life is but an empty dream/For the soul doth sleep/Things are not always what they seem." Rap is so appropriate here because the interview interaction is similar to adolescent communication. In adolescent communication, one expects words to be considerably bigger than the deeds -- the young must dream and much of the talk is game-play.

The last parameter in the conceptual structure is reciprocity, a mutual exchange of something. Applied to interviewing interaction, reciprocity describes the nonverbal interaction between interviewee and interviewer. If the interviewer does not feel well, he will tend to evoke negative feelings in the person with whom he is interacting, a process called negative reciprocity. To a certain extent, any person is capable of this influence on people with whom he interacts. Also, if a person decides without evidence that he does not like another person, he will tend to communicate a negative reciprocity, which in turn elicits the behavior to confirm the dislikes. Positive reciprocity works just the opposite.

Several investigators (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976; Fromm, 1959; Allport et al, 1951; Freud, 1946) have examined prevalent ideologies which have caused westerners to develop the interaction style just described. In their chapter on "the structure of intellect," Masland et al (1958: 185-95) state, "Although the recognition that cultural bias pervades our conventional tests of intelligence and represents an important advance in our knowledge, it does not in any explicit way consider the problem of the nature, range, or organization of intellectual abilities." Now that we have examined the structural relationships of prevalent ideologies in detail, we are to be reminded of the relativeness of perceptions. An example of an old experiment is: One is to have three basins of water; the first hot, the second tepid, and the third cold. One hand is put into the hot water and the other in the cold. After one leaves his hands immersed a minute or two, he discovers that the difference in warmth disappears. When both hands seem to be about the same warmth, they are both removed and simultaneously plunged into the basin containing the lukewarm water. Now the water will seem to have two temperatures at the same time; warm to one hand and cool to the other.

The dilemma of the three basins was used by John Locke as part of his argument that the apparent qualities of objects -- warmth, for example -- are not in the objects themselves, but in the minds of the persons who perceive the objects. The object is not warm, said Locke, it merely possesses the capacity of arousing the idea of warmth in the experimenter. If the warmth perceived was truly in the object itself, as it appears to be, it would be impossible for one to perceive two different warmths in one object at the same time.

Now we can turn to some institutional data to illustrate statistical differences between perceptions of the same "institutional climate." In all cases at the four universities the Black students perceived the "degree of trust between Black students and a) White students, b) the faculty, and c) the administration" significantly differ from the administration and faculty of those institutions.

When one examines the degree of trust administrators and faculty believe to exist between Black and White students at University "A," it is observed that Black students report considerably less trust. "B" University is a private religious institution, while the other three universities are different types of public institutions; it is interesting that the staff of "B" tends to rate campus relationships higher than the public staffs, while their Black students' ratings are about average when measured against the public Black students. Generally, the actual "climate" as reported by Black students is almost the reverse of the faculty's and administration's reports.

Table 1 about here.

Summary

The implications and consequences of the above misconceptions create a sort of self-perpetuating institutional discrimination which has many historic illustrations. The most extreme is racism and sexism which have tended to be manifested in Blacks with the most White features and females with the most male mannerisms; their being allowed to rise closer to the top which, in turn, justifies the White male being on top is the culprit and society's entrapment.

"The identity paradox" can be illustrated by a two dimensional graph: Institutional racism suggests (and far too many believe) that the White male should get a plus for being white and a plus for being male; the Black male gets a minus for being black and a plus for being male; the White female has a plus for being white and a minus for being female; and finally the Black female receives a minus for being black and a minus for being female. If everyone stayed in his (or her) conceptual place, Figure 3 would be a snapshot of society. The paradox is that while part of this society's mentality strides for a "melting pot," another (or maybe the same) part attempts to keep the person in his place (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976).

Figure 3 about here.

The message explicitly in that type of discrimination implies: if one is not White, then the closer one is to being White, the better off one is; and if one is not male, then the closer one is to being male, the better off one is. The Blacks and women often tend to keep other Blacks and women out of traditional "White-male" positions after they themselves have them. The need to be number one -- the first Black or the first woman to do such and such -- and stay number one is to do everything within one's power to keep everybody else number two.

The faculty's and administration's belief that "all is well" on their respective campuses is the manifestation of institutional racism -- a tendency to believe certain things or behaviors are so right that one does not question them anymore (Copeland, 1976; Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976). If the staffs had asked unassuming questions, they would have discovered racial problems on their respective campuses and understood that no person is beyond the influences of racism or sexism which affect him as an interviewer.

The theory does not answer all questions, but it does help us understand racism and sexism on and off college campuses and illustrates how these biases contaminate the interview and selection processes. What is needed next is to no longer "hold these truths to be self evidence" but to examine those truths by standards other than the traditional ones. The institutions must raise unassuming questions and develop solutions appropriate to deal with the new discoveries. Many institutions will have to do things which they have never done before, but for the most part, the institutions will remain the same.

Figure 1

Triadic Structural Relationships*

-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
Good	Bible	(God)	Super Ego	Reward	Parent	White
Literature	Humanity	(Human Soul)	Ego	Behavior	Adult	Society
Evil	Mythology	(Devil)	Id	Punishment	Child	Black

* Obviously, one could think of a great number of units to put in either or all structural relationships. Triad -1 is in parenthesis because most of its first teachers (promoters) taught this triad as an abstract ideological mode -- an experience in religiosity, i.e., the indoctrination is learned indirectly as contrasted to the direct approach of the other structural modes.

Figure 2

Conceptual Structure

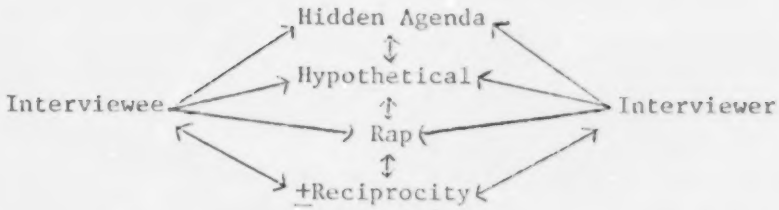

Figure 3

The Identity Paradox

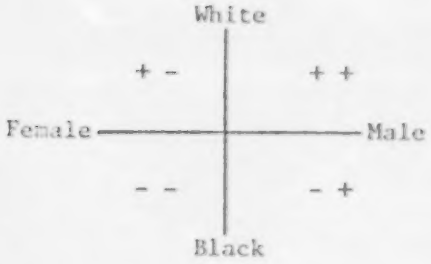

Table 1

A COMPARISON BETWEEN NIMH** DATA AND A STUDENT*** SURVEY DATA:
THE INSTITUTIONAL RACIAL CLIMATE

1. Degree of Trust Between Black Students and*		Mean Scores at Four Universities (A, B, C, and D)		
		ADM.**	FAC.**	STU.***
a) White Students	(for A) . . .	2.66 (35)	2.58 (229)	1.61 (87)
	(for B) . . .	3.21 (48)	3.28 (198)	1.77 (146)
	(for C) . . .	2.91 (21)	3.04 (96)	1.84 (244)
	(for D) . . .	2.82 (33)	2.98 (94)	1.88 (169)
b) The Faculty	(for A) . . .	2.97 (35)	2.98 (228)	2.00 (83)
	(for B) . . .	3.23 (47)	3.25 (200)	1.99 (147)
	(for C) . . .	2.95 (21)	3.18 (97)	1.62 (245)
	(for D) . . .	2.71 (34)	3.03 (98)	1.78 (169)
c) The Admin.	(for A) . . .	2.71 (35)	2.78 (222)	1.32 (84)
	(for B) . . .	3.51 (47)	3.09 (186)	1.71 (147)
	(for C) . . .	2.76 (21)	3.02 (95)	1.70 (238)
	(for D) . . .	2.74 (34)	2.74 (91)	1.75 (165)
2. The Degree of Racial Conflict on Campus*	(for A) . . .	2.83 (35)	2.64 (232)	3.36 (85)
	(for B) . . .	1.78 (49)	1.71 (214)	3.18 (147)
	(for C) . . .	2.19 (21)	1.78 (98)	3.28 (242)
	(for D) . . .	1.75 (36)	1.63 (98)	3.20 (168)

* Scale: Very Little = 1, Slight = 2, Some = 3, Substantial = 4, and Very Substantial = 5. Ns in parentheses.

** National Institute of Mental Health Data.

*** Copeland (1976). The administration and faculty rating of the "climate" appear to reflect wishful thinking on their part. The actual "climate" is almost the reverse of the faculty's and administration's belief.

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